

Rise and decline of Rhetoric in the European education

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Abstract

In this article are discussed the major marks of the Rhetoric's historic route as an integrant discipline of education for the European cult. Its birth is presented in ancient Greece of referring particularly Plato and Aristotles, it should be noted, then, their transformation into Oratory in the Roman civilization and recalling Marcianus Capella, Comenius and the Napoleonic Lyceum, which respectively in medieval, modern and contemporary times, helped to substantiate the educational importance of rhetoric and install it into the school European curriculum. As to this last aspect is exemplified with the essential marks of what incidentally, occurred in the Portuguese teaching between the 16th and 19th centuries. There is, finally, the decline of contemporary Rhetoric and an attempt to its rehabilitation by Chaim Perelman and to a lesser extent, by the Portuguese pedagogue Álvaro Ribeiro. We conclude presenting two possible explanatory hypotheses of this contemporary decline of Rhetoric.

Keywords: Pedagogy, Rhetoric, Europe, Portugal, Education.

Introduction

Over more than twenty centuries, the rhetoric has always been considered an essential discipline in the training of Europeans who had access to education. Accepted from classical antiquity as an essential discipline in the intellectual training of adolescence and youth and having marked presence in the schooling of students in these age groups in the long history of European pedagogy, the Rhetoric began to be discredited in the contemporary age and consequently causes its removal from the secondary school curricula since the 19th century.

In this article, in a historical and pedagogical perspective, is discussed this process of the rise and fall of Rhetoric, fixing the most important marks of this path and particularizing, with an illustrative intention, what happened in Portugal during modern and contemporary ages. We do not want, therefore, to present the detailed historical development of Rhetoric, but only to indicate those which we believe to be the crucial marks of that evolution that deserve approach on this occasion.

Sources and Methods

Sources of this research are the works of the authors referred in the text, as well as the education legislation

relevant to the subject matter and paying attention to some passive bibliography.

In the research was used a historical-heuristic, hermeneutic-analytical, of synthesis and problematologic-reflexive methodology. Historical-heuristic is in the sense that, first, we proceeded to the collection and selection of sources needed to develop the work. Hermeneutic-analytical was developed because of work of interpretation and distinction between the information collected. Of synthesis has been condensed because the product of the application of the hermeneutic-analytical method to the speech extension strictly necessary to make it understandable. Problematologic-reflexive was because it by asking questions and reflecting about them to give answers that the research has progressed.

Discussion

From classical antiquity to contemporary era-panoramic perspective: Considering the Rhetoric based on Sicily philosophers, Empedocles of Agrigentum, his disciple Corax of Syracuse and the disciple of him, Tísias, also from Syracuse, or envision the Rhetoric based on Protagoras of Abdera, Gorgias of Leontini (another philosopher from Sicily) or of other sophists who passed through Athens, it was with these thinkers and pedagogues of the 5th century B.C. that the Rhetoric has begun to highlight as a technique essential to teach in the education of the children of the higher class of Athens and in general, the ancient Greece. And in addition to these philosophers and sophists, also Socrates (470/69-399), Plato (428/27-347) and Aristotle (384/83-322) theorized about it and have highlighted its historical development.¹⁹

In Gorgias, Plato, through the voice of Socrates, distinguishes between "the two species of persuasion, one that creates the belief without science and another that is given by science" and concluded that the Rhetoric is the persuasion "produced by the belief and not by science (...) [in] that the rhetorical, in the courts and in other assemblies, does not present what is fair and what is unfair but suggests an opinion and nothing more". Here the rhetoric, in this work, is not regarded as an art, but adulation, that is, "a practice that has nothing to do with art and that only requires a shrewd and courageous spirit and a natural disposition to learn how to deal with the men (...) as (...) the gastronomy (...) know how to dress well and the sophistry".⁹

Later, however, in Phaedrú, always through Socrates, Plato has to admit that under certain conditions, there is a way to the Rhetoric can also be regarded as an art, as something more, therefore, than comparable to the ability

for cooking or for clothing. There was, therefore, a "true art of Rhetoric", whose possession Pericles (c. 495/92 B.C. - 429 b.C.) had been historical example and that was explained by the use of the analogy with the medicine as follows: "In one and in another it is made the analysis of the nature, the body nature [Medicine] and the soul nature [Rhetoric]. One cannot fail to take this into account if we want to treat both not only with skill and experience, but with art, medicating and nourishing the body in order to have health and persuading the soul with an honest argument to make it become virtuous".¹⁰

The true Rhetoric would be then the art of persuading through an honest argumentation. The rhetorical discourse that this configures, would, finally, educate the soul in the sense "of what is fair, beautiful and good", thus distancing and differentiating of the rhetorical discourse mentioned and criticized in *Gorgias*, whose purpose was persuaded on the basis of the belief and the mere opinion. Plato, in *Phaedrus*, puts us in before a new Rhetoric, a superior Rhetoric, to the extent that it constitutes as a pedagogical process of lifting the consideration of justice, beauty and goodness. However, in the economy of Platonic thought, this elevation to the fair, beautiful and good, is what characterizes the Philosophy and consequently, what distinguishes the philosophers of the common people. Thus, it is understandable that in this dialog, Plato intends that pass to designate otherwise that is not rhetorical, the masters in the art of persuading with honest arguments, having in view the education of the public to whom they are addressed to the justice, beauty and goodness: the designation of rhetorical does not serve, (...) but the designation as a philosopher, or other similar, will be more appropriate".¹⁰

The Stagirian, in his work entitled precisely Rhetoric, makes it clear that, as to its nature, the Rhetoric is not a scientific particular knowledge, only dominated by specialists, but, as the Dialectic, of which is like the back, or the other side, is a knowledge commonly held by any person, that can be used in the context of an argumentative discourse, always that it becomes necessary to defend or to attack an opponent, through an enthymematic syllogism. It is, therefore, following Aristotle, the ability, dexterity, art or science, to discover the means of persuasion whose employment becomes more appropriate in a given and specific argumentation. Aristotle, divides the Rhetoric into three genres: the Deliberative, or Political, which wants to persuade about the advantages, or disadvantages, of events that will take place in the future; the Judicial, or Forensic, which tries to convince about the justice, or injustice, concerning facts of the past, that have already occurred, therefore; the Epideictic, or Ceremonial, regarding the persuasion on the truth and value, or error and lack of value, of something that is current.¹

Later in time, already in the context of roman times of the pedagogy of European classical antiquity, Cicero (106-43

b.C.) 5 and a century later, Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (c. 35-95)¹⁷, pointed it as a matter of teaching unavoidable in the education of future speakers, here dating, also, the Latin alternative name of Rhetoric as Oratory, not as a mere alternative, but adding the verbal eloquence to the art of persuasion.

Later, already in the 5th century of the Christian era, Marcellinus Capella, in his work Nine books on the marriage of Mercury and Philology and on the seven liberal arts, in which he wrote about the seven arts (techniques) that released the human spirit from the chains of ignorance of the superior world of rationality, has divided them into two groups, one with three (*trivium*) and another with four (*quadrivium*) arts, placing in the first the Rhetoric, along with the Grammar and Dialectic, grouping in the second Geometry, Arithmetic, Astronomy and Music. In this work, Marcellinus Capella also wrote about two more arts - Architecture and Medicine. However, it was considered that these two types of knowledge, did not contribute to the rational elevation of who had learned them and were not worthy of being among the liberal arts, which, therefore, would be only seven.³

For the medieval pedagogy were the seven liberal arts including the Rhetoric, as the posterior curriculum to the learning of the intellectual rudiments (read, write and count), which, in low Middle Age, had become a prerequisite of compulsory attendance for those who wished to participate in studies of the faculties (Theology, Philosophy, Law and Medicine) in the arising universities, sometimes incorporating its study in the faculty of Philosophy, for this reason also called, in some cases, faculty of Arts.²

In the modern age, even rejected the previous scholastic-verbalistic tradition, will be with a major name of pedagogical realism, the Czech protestant Jan Amos Komenský (1592-1670), or Comenius, Latin translation of his name by which commonly is more known, without prejudice to his call for attention to the importance of prior sensitization to the rhetoric of children under six years of age (Maternal school) that we find the proposal of Rhetoric to constitute the main subject of study of the last and sixth class, or academic year, of the Latin school. This means, in the economy of the plan of studies designed by Comenius, that would be between the 18 and the 19 years old that would be learned the art of persuasion, immediately before, therefore, the first year of higher education.⁶

At the beginning of contemporaneity, the European pedagogy continued to not imagine a secondary nature teaching without the Rhetoric learning. This paradigmatically demonstrating was the measure taken at the creation, in France, of the Napoleonic Lyceum, in the broader context of the creation of the Imperial University, to which was given the responsibility of all the public schools in the empire, therefore also of the lyceums -in

order of importance the schools immediately subsequent to the faculties-, in which, among other subjects, was ordered to be learned the Rhetoric.⁷

The Portuguese case: This model would influence Portugal in the consulate of Passos Manuel (1801-1862), at which time were created the national lyceums, whose curriculum initially included the Rhetoric, albeit with its Latin name (Oratory). Before, however, in the 16th century and referring only to the teaching that was in the hands of the Portuguese crown, the cultural policy of D. João III (1502-1577) had not forgotten the technique of persuasion because was included in the study themes at the Royal College of Arts and Humanities, or simply College of the Arts, which has worked in Coimbra, between 1542 and 1837, with the objective of teaching the liberal arts and the humanities and even more basically the reading and writing.⁴

Later, in what has been the first systematic state Portuguese organization of all levels of education, which took place in the reign of D. José I (1714-1777), under the baton of the Marquês de Pombal, Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo (1699-1782), the Rhetoric again was not forgotten in two legal texts that better delineated the reform of smaller schools, so-called to be distinguished from the bigger schools that were the faculty of the University of Coimbra. In fact, in the royal permit of 28th of June, 1759, after accusing the Company of Jesus from the evils which supposedly, had caused to the learning of the humanities in the kingdom of Portugal, the sovereign ordered the reform of this teaching, creating places for teachers of Latin grammar, of Greek and of Rhetoric. Without the knowledge of these arts no student could join the Portuguese university, being not enough, however that the students had attended those classes, because they would have to be submitted, also, to the final exam, done in Coimbra, with a jury designated by the studies director, the entity that nationally presided to the education resulting from this reform.¹¹

Thirteen years later, the law of 6th of November 1772 completed the permit of 28th of June 1759, by creating in the kingdom and its domains beyond the seas, schools read, write and count and respective places for teachers and by joining to Grammar, Latin, Greek and Rhetoric, the new subject of Philosophy, in which would be taught Logic and Ethics. As regards to the Rhetoric, there would be forty two teachers places in the European Portuguese territory, six in Brazil and one in Goa.¹⁵

But let us return to the foundation of the Portuguese schools under Passos Manuel, by the decree of 17th of November, 1836, whose articles 38 to 70 deal with precisely the type of secondary education. In the decree that imposed it, was enjoined that the secondary education would be universally composed of ten disciplines (there were still some other to teach, but only in the lyceums of

Lisbon, Porto and Coimbra). Of those dozen disciplines was not any with the strict description of Rhetoric, but there was, however, the discipline of Oratory, poetic and classical literature¹³. And the next reform, made by Costa Cabral (1803-1899), dating from 1844, despite the decline in the number of disciplines in the universal curriculum (from ten to six), remains the Oratory, now in a discipline with designation more extensive than that of 1836: Oratory, poetic and classical literature, especially the Portuguese.¹⁴

In the two following reforms continued the presence of the Oratory. Thus, the reform of Fontes Pereira de Melo (1819-1887), then minister of the kingdom of a government led by Joaquim Antonio de Aguiar (1792-1884), operated in 1860, provided for a discipline of Oratorical, poetic and literature, to be taught in the third and fifth years (and last years) of the course beyond, with a weekly work load of, respectively, four and eight hours.¹²

Three years later, the reform of Anselmo José Braamcamp (1817-1885), minister of the kingdom in a government of Marquês de Loulé (1804-1875), divided the Portuguese lyceums in two classes, the first and the second, being in both continued to be taught the discipline of Oratory poetic and literature, in the fifth year and with ten hours a week, in the case of first class lyceums, with the same ten hours, but in the fourth year, in the case of the second class lyceums.¹⁶

And here ended the right of rhetoric to be included in the curriculum of Portuguese lyceums as the constituent of an own discipline and present in its title, or, at least, part of a discipline and respective designation, having the same being verified, by this time, in most of the European countries.

The rehabilitation of contemporary Rhetoric: However, the twentieth century was able to attend the rehabilitation of Rhetoric, both with regard to its own value as art of persuasive arguments and to its educational value. Chaim Perelman (1912-1984) was the biggest name of the New Rhetoric, but we cannot fail to mention his colleague Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (1899 to 1987).⁸

In The new rhetoric: Treatise of argumentation, once in the Introduction, the authors crease that what is treated in this work is only the persuasive argumentation technique, regardless of the content of speech and especially, in the light of the auditorium in which the persuasive argument is developed, because the understanding of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, even when, in Phaedrus, Plato admits a superior dimension, as of divine, of the Rhetoric, what is an issue is a technique to convince an audience of superior men, even a technique to convince the Gods themselves, in the words of the authors.

Also in Portugal a voice has been raised for rehabilitating the educational value of Rhetoric: the philosopher and

educator Álvaro Ribeiro (1905-1981). This important thinker of the Portuguese Philosophy, in *General Studies* (1961), demonstrating not ignore Perelman and the New Rhetoric, made an apology for the educational value of Rhetoric. Our author, based on the consideration of the art of argumentation as "the study of the processes of communication of thoughts and feelings (...) [which] teaches to produce the appropriate arguments for opportunities and circumstances" understood, however, that these arguments needed a rational legitimation. At every opportunity and circumstance i.e. in each case, knowing how to communicate thoughts (and feelings) through rationally justified arguments, here is the definition of Rhetoric to Álvaro Ribeiro, who, so ago we saw, reminds us of the Aristotelian source. And if a definition does not exhaust one conception, its definition is, however, contained the conception. So, in this definition are implicit the two pillars of the Alvarina conception of Rhetoric: the ability to communicate the thought (first pillar) through rational argumentation (second pillar).¹⁸

Regarding the ability to communicate the thought, Álvaro Ribeiro did not refer to any thought, but the thinking which expressed a judgment value, which, from a concept preached another which valorized the first. Unless that, our pedagogue believed that we could be facing a phenomenon of expressiveness, who depreciated the true meaning of Rhetoric, but we would not be facing a rhetoric discourse, characterized, in his own words, by "the fluent image of a course of judgments, reasoning and arguments".¹⁸

This was happening with the second pillar of Rhetoric: the argument with rational sustainability. And rational precisely because it is founded on this logical nodular operation that is the judgment, upstream and downstream of which are, precisely, the concept and the syllogism, two logical operations without which the judgment cannot be built (concept), or cannot be expanded (syllogism).

The Alvarin Rhetoric pedagogy had as a major objective the study of the technique of persuasion, objective which, incidentally, was shared with the other disciplines of trivium. This objective was to give the boys who reach the age of reason a response which, inspired by the Aristotelian model (the formal school), help them to "solve all the problems that present themselves to adolescence [thus enabling] learners access to full sentimental and intellectual maturity". So, mature sentimental and intellectually the adolescents is to comply with the process of adolescence, since adolescence is exactly mature, being the adult precisely who already have matured, who already has grown up. The educational aim of Rhetoric was, therefore, to Álvaro Ribeiro, create adults.¹⁸

Conclusion

Since the classical civilization, up to the beginning of the modern age, the Rhetoric has been taken as a formative essential discipline of the educated European. Suddenly,

however, from the 19th century and consolidating in the 20th century, this millennial interest by Rhetoric disappeared, despite some attempts to rehabilitate it. However, with regard to the pedagogical model-school, there were no practical significant rehabilitation effects of Rhetoric played Chaïm Perelman and which had a particular expression in Portugal through Álvaro Ribeiro. In fact, still, today, is seen a landscape of an almost total wilderness of Rhetoric in the curricula of education at the secondary and higher Europeans curricula, serving the exceptions only to confirm this rule.

This scenario may have, in our understanding, two possible explanations; more next in time one of them, more remote, but perhaps more structural, the other.

Starting with the first possibility, the closest in time, we cannot fail to notice that the expulsion of the Rhetoric of the European curriculum, here exemplified with the case of Portuguese lyceums, coincided in time with the advent of scientific positivism, driven by Auguste Comte (1798-1857). We believe, therefore, that the advancement of positivistic mentality was not unconnected with the decline of the Rhetoric in the European scholarly. The positivism, in fact, has departed from the scientific forum any knowledge that would go beyond, or remained below, or would be strange to explanation based on the scientific evidence, on the facts, on the visible.

But if, for the positivists, the tangible reality spoke for itself, it would require, however, a discourse which interprets it, namely, the scientific discourse, that, because of this, by them was credited as the only intellectual construct worthy of credit. Therefore, all other discourses – rhetorical included- have become things of the past and signs of rationality behind the positivist scientism, therefore losing their educational importance.

The second explanation is the ambiguity of purpose of the rhetorical speech equated by Plato in *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, as behind seen: perhaps we have reached the historical-pedagogic moment in which the Rhetoric while art exalted in *Phaedrus* outstripped the Rhetoric while mere ability criticized in the *Gorgias*. The honest argument opinion, finally, imposed itself to the opinion adapted to circumstances. And in the respective importances, not even the reference, or Aristotelian inspiration, of Perelman and Álvaro Ribeiro, managed, until now, to open an alternate path, precisely because of its Aristotelian inspiration.

That being the case, was not exactly the Rhetoric that went into decline in the contemporary world. It was, rather, the sophist Rhetoric conception, on the one hand and the mere technician-argumentative formalism, on the other hand that gave place to Platonic Dialectic expressed in the philosophical discursive substance that underlies the education of man to the highest values of justice, beauty and goodness. And continuing Philosophy, as it continues,

to be held in the European education (scholar or other), there continues to exist the Rhetoric, of course that only as an educational art of educating for those superior values of justice, beauty and goodness.

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